

ART. XVI.—*Tenacity of Life in the Platypus, (Ornithorhynchus paradoxus.)* By LUDWIG BECKER.

IN the middle of the month of September a living male Platypus was brought to Melbourne, when I had a good opportunity of making the following observations. When I saw the animal for the first time, it was lying rolled up and seemingly asleep in a large wooden box. I removed it from there and placed it in a bucket full of water, in which the animal swam about for a few seconds, and placing the tip of its bill upon the edge of the bucket, it blew the water, which had accumulated in the mouth, through the nostrils. The animal then moved the hairs, which covered the cavities of the ears, up and down at pleasure (as if they were the ears themselves), showing here two dry spots, which contrasted greatly with the surrounding wet and darker coloured hairs of the head. The Platypus remained but a few minutes in the water, after which it crawled over the edge of the vessel on dry ground, and searched for some comfortable nook, wherein to repose after its involuntary bath. If by chance it happened to meet with moist ground, it dabbled about in it with its bill, after the manner of a duck. Upon my endeavouring to lift it up by the head, it made so desperate a defence, striking and scratching my hand so effectually, that I was obliged to leave the animal alone. On one of the hind feet was fastened a piece of string, intended as a safeguard against escape; seeing, however, that the foot was much swollen from the pressure, I cut the bonds, thereby allowing the Platypus to wander free, so far as the extent of the box would permit, having provided a supply of water and food, of which, however, the captive did not seem to partake. On the following day it had lost much of its vivacity and strength, which I attributed to its obstinately refusing all nourishment; it became daily weaker, and I saw there was no hope to keep it alive. A short time before its death I heard the poor animal moaning and groaning like a child whose end is fast approaching; its sides panted very much by each respiration; the inhaled air was emitted through the nostrils with a sigh; and the poor creature was soon freed, without convulsions, from bondage and all its pains.

A post mortem examination showed the following remarkable facts. The Platypus had been fired at, while swimming in the river Ex, and the shot had taken the following effect: The whole of the back was covered with blue spots, without



the shots, however, having penetrated the skin, which fact can be accounted for by the Platypus swimming in such a manner as to leave only a part of the head visible. One shot went through the jaws, another in the left eye, destroying it totally, and the skull was fractured to such a degree that several particles of the cranium penetrated the brain, and were found there together with masses of coagulated blood. The wound in the head was nearly an inch long and half an inch broad. Besides this, one of the hind feet was so much swollen and inflamed that its colour was blood red, and the skin had been cut here in order to form an issue, which, however, had not taken place.

Taking all these circumstances into consideration, it appears that the Platypus possesses a tenacity of life not very likely to be found in animals of the higher order. The *Ornithorhynchus*, indeed, deserves also, in this respect, to be called "paradoxus."

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ART. XVII.—*Native Zinc embedded in Basalt.* By  
LUDWIG BECKER.

On the 26th of October, 1855, a piece of metal was shown me here in Melbourne, by Mr. W. Clarke, the well-known gold broker, who also mentioned that it had been found in a block of basalt, not far from Melbourne. I immediately hastened to the spot in order to learn something more particular about the interesting find. The locality is a basalt quarry near Brunswick, at the back of the Collingwood Stockade. The finder of the metal gave me the following particulars, which were corroborated by a dozen workmen, who were present at the find. The man spoke as follows: "Look here, Sir, the 'Bluestone' begins about four feet below the surface, and I bored a hole in a solid piece, 5 feet by 4, in order to blast it. As soon as this was done, I commenced breaking the large pieces of stone with a heavy hammer, and out of one of the pieces, a white mass fell on the ground, which I, out of curiosity, picked up. I found it rather heavy, and wishing to know what it was, I broke the mass, which presented then a blueish white and brilliant shining metallic surface. Thinking it to be silver, I requested one of my neighbours to show it to Mr. Clarke, and the piece you hold in your hands is the identi-